

Return to Use Initiative

2004 Demonstration Project

Tri-County Landfill: South Elgin, Illinois



After a site has been cleaned up, if any waste has been left on site, EPA must reevaluate the implementation and performance of the site's remedy every five years to ensure that the remedy continues to protect human health and the environment. This process is called a Five-Year Review. This thorough evaluation provides an opportunity for EPA to examine not only past cleanup actions at the site but also the future of the site. Region 5 began the Tri-County Landfill site's Five-Year Review at the same time that EPA sought to establish demonstration projects for the Return to Use Initiative. As part of the Initiative in 2004, EPA used the Tri-County Landfill's Five-Year Review as a testing ground for how the Superfund Five-Year Review process can be used to evaluate and support the future use of sites.

THE SITE: From 1961 until 1976, the Tri-County Landfill and the neighboring Elgin Landfill, both in South Elgin, Illinois, accepted solid and liquid commercial and industrial waste. When EPA detected volatile organic compounds in downgradient ground water wells in 1984, ten thousand residents within three miles of the landfill were using ground water as their drinking water source. EPA and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency recommended that area residents not drink water from these wells. Further investigation revealed contamination in landfill surface soils and the surface water of adjacent wetlands. EPA and potentially responsible parties took action at the site to construct a landfill cap and a gas collection system. Ground water is being monitored to determine the effectiveness of the cap in reducing ground water contamination.

THE OPPORTUNITY: The Tri-County Landfill may present a good opportunity for recreational reuse. The western edge of the site borders on a prairie path and the Kane County Forest Preserve is interested in developing walking trails and recreational fields on the site. However, these plans are currently on hold because the Illinois Department of Transportation has plans to build a road that might interfere with the forest preserve's plan and other development in the area.

THE BARRIER: The landfill area of the site is fenced and topped with barbed wire. A potentially responsible party operates a transfer facility adjacent to the Tri-County Landfill. On-going activity at this facility provides a high level of site security by making it difficult for unauthorized personnel to access the site. In addition, Woodland Landfill to the west of the Tri-County Landfill is an operating municipal landfill facility. On-going activity at this facility will also discourage unauthorized personnel from accessing the site until reuse modifications are implemented.

THE FIVE-YEAR REVIEW AND FUTURE REUSE: Because all reuse plans in the area are on hold, the Tri-County Landfill site is participating in the Return to Use initiative as a demonstration project that examines the Five-Year Review process as a forum for considering Superfund site reuse. The Army Corps of Engineers completed a Five-Year Review for the site in September 2004 with special emphasis on site reuse considerations. Because of this, EPA hopes that when the transportation corridor issue in South Elgin is resolved, the community will better understand appropriate reuse options for the site. EPA is currently working with landowners to implement appropriate and effective institutional controls, which will help to facilitate safe reuse when local conditions allow.

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